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AUTHOR	Reich, Carol
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ABSTRACT

Designed to assess the maturity level of the novels which students read, the Novel Reading Maturity Scale (NRMS) is based on the notion that fiction of high quality is characterized by a number of themes or topics. The list of 22 topics in NRMS came from a survey of several guides on books for teenagers. To explore the reliability of the scale, five groups of students, with over 400 in each group, were asked to use the scale on a different novel each member of the group had recently read in school. The average agreement over all themes ranged from 70 to 84 percent. Additional reliability data came from small groups of English teachers who used the scale on the same five novels on which the students had reported. Teachers and students agreed on the presence or absence of 17 to 22 of the 22 themes. [This document is one of those reviewed in The Research Instruments Project (TRIP) monograph "Measures for Research and Evaluation in the English Language Arts" to be published by the Committee on Research of the National Council of Teachers of English in cooperation with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills. A TRIP review which precedes the document lists its category (Literature), title, author, date, and age range (junior high--postsecondary), and describes the instrument's purpose and physical characteristics.] (JM)

NCTE Committee on Research

The Research Instruments Project (TRIP)

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The attached document contains one of the measures reviewed in the TRIP committee monograph titled:

Measures for Research and Evaluation in the English Language Arts

TRIP is an acronym which signifies an effort to abstract and make readily available measures for research and evaluation in the English language arts. These measures relate to language development, listening, literature, reading, standard English as a second language or dialect, teacher competencies, or writing. In order to make these instruments more readily available, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills has supported the TRIP committee sponsored by the Committee on Research of the National Council of Teachers of English and has processed the material into the ERIC system. The ERIC Clearinghouse accession numbers that encompass most of these documents are CS 201320 - CS 201375.

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CS 201367

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Category: Literature

Title: Novel Reading Maturity Scale

Author: Carol Reich

Age Range: Junior High-Post Secondary

Description of Instrument:

Purpose: To assess the maturity level of novels students read.

Date of Construction: 1973

Physical Description: The NRMS is based on the notion that fiction of high quality is characterized by a large number of themes or topics. The scale is included below:

Of all the novels you have read since September, name the one you enjoyed the most.

Title:_____

Novels have different topics. Some novels have only one topic; others have many. Listed below are some topics that frequently appear in novels. Describe the novel you have named as your favorite by writing a "1" beside each topic that appeared in it. For example, if there was horror in your novel, place a "1" in the space beside the topic. __1__ Horror

If there was no horror in your novel, leave that space blank:
_____ Horror

____Fantasy or make believe	____Life in other countries
____Ghosts, gods, supernatural	____Life in other periods of history
____Horror	____Life in our own society
____Science fiction	____Sex
____Cars and Sports	____Love and romance
____Mystery	____Home and family life
____Physical danger and adventure	____Lives of young people
____Lives of adults	____Making personal decisions
____Possible careers	____Overcoming problems and difficulties
____Social injustice	____Politics
____Religion	____Choosing between right and wrong

The student identifies a novel he has read recently and then indicates how many different topics he remembers from the novel.

Validity, Reliability, and Normative Data:

The list of topics in NRMS came from a survey of several guides on books for teenagers. The author mentions that topics can be added to or subtracted from the list or that a quite different list could be constructed, so long as the topics are clear and unambiguous.

To explore the reliability of the scale, five groups of students, with over 400 in each group, were each asked to use the scale on a different novel each member of the group had recently read in school. The average agreement over all themes ranged from 70 to 84 percent; for example, it was 77 percent for A Tale of Two Cities and 79 percent for To Kill a Mockingbird. Additional reliability data came from small groups (from five to fourteen in size) of English teachers who used the scale on the same five novels the students had reported on. Teachers and students agreed on the presence or absence of seventeen to twenty-two of the twenty-two themes, revealing that students are for the most part reporting accurately. The author summarizes as follows: "In general, then, the scale seems quite reliable. Students agree on the interpretations of themes, and whether or not they are present in a book. Students generally agree with teachers on the themes."

The author points out that the scale should properly be used to assess groups of students, not individuals. The reliability of measurement for individuals can be improved by having them rate several novels.

Additional validity data was sought in correlation of NRMS scores with reading ability scores, on the assumption that good readers would be better able to cope with a thematically rich book. A Pearson product moment correlation of .51 was found.

Normative data from approximately 2,000 students in Toronto high schools is included below:

Percentage of Students Checking Each Theme

Theme	Percentage
Fantasy or make believe	22
Ghosts, gods and supernatural events	14
Horror	21
Science fiction	16
Cars and sports	11
Mystery	39
Physical danger and adventure	67
Life in other countries	36
Life in other periods of history	38
Life in our own society	31
Sex	28
Love and romance	46
Home and family life	36
Lives of young people	48
Lives of adults	51
Possible careers	14
Making personal decisions	53
Overcoming problems and difficulties	66
Social injustice	44
Politics	28
Religion	23
Choosing between right and wrong	54

The author notes that these data reveal student reading preferences and can be used to guide book selection.

Related Documents:

Reich, Carol. "A Scale to Assess Reading Maturity," Journal of Reading, 17 (December 1973), 220-223.

Journal of Reading, Volume 17, No. 3, December, 1973.

A Scale to Assess Reading Maturity

CAROL REICH

Concerned with several aspects of language development—reading ability, interests and writing ability, Carol Reich is a research associate for the Toronto Board of Education.

■ There are three questions of interest to teachers of English. The first, "Can students read?", is very often answered with standardized reading achievement tests. The second, "Will students read?", is answered with some of the newly developed scales measuring attitudes toward reading (Estes, 1971, for instance). But a third question remains, and it is the reason for asking the first two: "What will students read?" Measuring *what* is more difficult.

In the course of evaluating a secondary school reading program, a method was developed for measuring the quality of student reading. The method is simple, objective, and can be used with any work of fiction, even those with which the teacher may be unfamiliar. It is called the Novel Maturity Scale.

Most teachers have an intuitive idea of what is a "good" as opposed to a "bad" book. There are generally recognized types of books which teachers tend to agree are substandard. These books are quite often recognized by their themes: science

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Table 1
Format of the Novel Maturity Scale

Of all the novels you have read since September, name the one you enjoyed the most.

Title _____

Novels have different topics. Some novels have only one topic, others have many. Listed below are some topics that frequently appear in novels. Describe the novel you have named as your favorite by writing a "1" beside each topic that appeared in it. For example, if there was horror in your novel, place a "1" in the space beside that topic. __1__ Horror

If there was no horror in your novel, leave that space blank. _____ Horror

_____ Fantasy or make believe
_____ Ghosts, gods, supernatural
_____ Horror
_____ Science fiction
_____ Cars and sports
_____ Mystery
_____ Physical danger and adventure
_____ Life in other countries
_____ Life in other periods of history
_____ Life in our own society
_____ Sex
_____ Love and romance
_____ Home and family life
_____ Lives of young people
_____ Lives of adults
_____ Possible careers
_____ Making personal decisions
_____ Overcoming problems and difficulties
_____ Social injustice
_____ Politics
_____ Religion
_____ Choosing between right and wrong

fiction, mystery, western, romance. However, it is the assumption behind the Novel Maturity Scale that what differentiates a mature book from an immature book is not the theme itself, but the number of themes.

A James Bond novel, for example, is substandard not because it is a detective story—*The Hound of the Baskervilles* is also a detective story. A Sue Barton story is substandard not because it is a romance—*Anna Karenina* is also a romance. What differentiates stories about James Bond and Sue Barton from *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *Anna Karenina* is the fact that the substandard books are books of only single themes, very simple books, treating only single aspects of life, presenting only a few ideas. They do not mirror life in its complexity and richness.

The Novel Maturity Scale assesses a student's reading level by measuring the thematic richness of the books he enjoys. The first step in using the scale is to have each student name a favorite novel. The time period from which the student may draw can be limited in any way that suits the teacher or researcher, but it is probably better to encourage students to describe a novel which they have read in the recent past so that it will be fresh in their minds. The students may be asked to name their favorite novels from the past semester or from the past school year. Or, they can be asked to name several novels, an approach which would yield a more reliable and valid measure since it would reflect a greater part of their reading experience. It is also advantageous to have students name novels which they have read during their leisure time, since such novels might more fully reflect their preferences rather than the school program.

The students then study a list of themes which are common in fiction, and check each one which appears in the novel they have named. The list of twenty-two themes used in the present study, along with the format of the question, appears in Table 1. However, themes can be added or subtracted from the list as desired, or a completely new list could be con-

structed. It is necessary only that themes be clear, unambiguous, and not redundant. The present list was constructed after consulting several guides on books for teenagers.

After completing the scale, determine the number of themes that each student has checked. Then compute the average number of themes checked by the group as a whole. This average represents, on a relative scale, the maturity level at which members of the group are reading. In the absence of norms for how many themes a "worthwhile" book should contain, it is impossible to say whether or not they are really mature readers. But it is possible to use the scale to find out whether they are more mature readers than they used to be, or whether they are more mature readers than some other group of students from a different class or program. In view of the limited nature of the scale, it should not be used to assess individual students, but only groups of students.

Table 2
Percentage of Students Checking Each Theme

Theme	Percentage
Fantasy or make believe	22
Ghosts, gods and supernatural events	14
Horror	21
Science fiction	16
Cars and sports	11
Mystery	39
Physical danger and adventure	67
Life in other countries	36
Life in other periods of history	38
Life in our own society	31
Sex	28
Love and romance	46
Home and family life	36
Lives of young people	48
Lives of adults	51
Possible careers	14
Making personal decisions	53
Overcoming problems and difficulties	66
Social injustice	44
Politics	28
Religion	23
Choosing between right and wrong	54

How reliable is the scale? In order to gather data on this question, five groups of students each described one novel, one that everyone in the group had read in class. Close to 400 students rated each book. If more than half the students in a group checked a theme, it was considered to be present in the novel; if half or less than half checked a theme, it was considered not to be present. In either case, the percentage of students agreeing on the presence or absence of a theme was found for each of the twenty-two themes. For each book, the average agreement over all themes was found. This ranged from 70 percent to 84 percent as follows: *The Chrysalids*—70 percent; *A Tale of Two Cities*—77 percent; *To Kill a Mockingbird*—79 percent; *Animal Farm*—81 percent; *Scarlett Pimpernell*—84 percent.

The areas of disagreement varied from book to book. A chi-square analysis showed that there was significant agreement on from seventeen to twenty-two of the themes among the five books. But the themes about which students disagreed varied from book to book.

Additional data on reliability were provided by small groups of English teachers—from five to fourteen per group—who described the same books using the scale. Teachers and students agreed on the presence or absence of seventeen to twenty-two of the twenty-two themes, indicating that students are generally giving an accurate report on what they are reading. Again, the areas of disagreement varied from book to book, indicating that no particular theme was ill-defined.

In general, then, the scale seems quite reliable. Students agree on the interpretations of themes, and

whether or not they are present in a book. Students generally agree with teachers on the themes.

Method Applied

Thirty-two grade 10 classes were administered the Novel Maturity Scale, and the survey section of a diagnostic reading test. Data on the occupation of the students' fathers were also available, and were coded to reflect socioeconomic status, using Blishen's Scale (1967). Average ratings on these three measures were found for each class.

There was a great deal of variation in the average number of themes that students in a class checked, ranging from 5.9 to 10.8, with an average of 8.1.

If the scale is a valid measure of reading maturity, we would expect Novel Maturity scores to correlate with reading ability scores. Presumably poor readers would be less able to cope with a thematically rich book. The Pearson product moment correlation between class averages on the Novel Maturity Scale and the Diagnostic Reading Test is .51. However, socioeconomic status also contributes to reading maturity ($r = .39$), and when this is partialled out, the correlation between reading maturity and reading skill is reduced to .36. This figure is significant at the .10 level.

Data from the Novel Maturity Scale can also be used to examine students' reading preferences. Table 2 lists the percentage of students who checked each theme as occurring in their favorite novel. Such data are useful in choosing books for a library or for a course, or in identifying students who have unusual interests.

In conclusion, then, the Novel Maturity Scale is a simple, objective and reliable measure of the level at which students read; it can be used to investigate reading preferences and the success of language programs.

References

Blishen, B. R. "A Socio-Economic Index for Occupations in Canada." *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1967), pp. 41-53.

The Committee on Diagnostic Reading Tests, Inc. *Diagnostic Reading Tests*. Survey Section (Upper Level), 1947. Distributed by Science Research Associates, Inc., Chicago, Illinois.

Estes, Thomas H. "A Scale to Measure Attitudes toward Reading." *Journal of Reading*, vol. 15, no. 2 (November 1971), p. 135.

Summer '74

In a slight change of policy, JR will publish in its spring issues a listing of summer courses and workshops of special interest to reading specialists, classroom teachers of reading, and other members of IRA. Programs to be included in the list must be sponsored by nonprofit educational institutions—colleges, universities, school systems. The editor reserves the right to limit announcements.

Potential entries should include course titles, credits available, locations, costs, dates, and names and addresses for correspondence. Send notices three months before publication date to "Summer '74, the *Journal of Reading*, International Reading Association, Six Tyre Avenue, Newark, Delaware 19711."